



God of Light, enter into the darkness of our lives and open our eyes to your light, shining in each of us. Empower us to share your light and to walk in your light today and everyday. Amen

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. The beginning of a new year. An opportunity to let go of past ways that have not served us or those around us. An opportunity to start anew.

We also have the option to continue as we are, walking in fear and uncertainty around the state of the world; walking in anger; holding grudges; and putting one step in front of the other, head down against the winds of change that blow gusts against our own firmly planted lives.

Throughout this Advent season, we will journey through Isaiah's proclamations of a better world. A world of peace, justice and love. In many ways, today's text is Isaiah's "I have a dream" sermon.

It's more than just words that have been miraculously placed in Isaiah's mouth. It is the word that he sees ... a world that he sees; a world that has little resemblance to what the Israelites currently know. We've heard this vision before and will hear it again, in different versions throughout the coming weeks.

We will be taught the ways of the Lord; swords beaten into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks. The focus of all people will be on feeding one another instead of killing each other. Wars will cease and all people will come to God and walk in the light of the Lord.

It's a difficult dream for us to grasp and hold onto when we are so surrounded by darkness. And as usual, our tendency will be to keep on keeping on, as we usually have, not really allowing this good word to embed itself in our hearts, infiltrate our thinking and influence our living.

Afterall, it's far too overwhelming to even consider that we might have any effect on such a global, or perhaps I should say such a heavenly matter.

You may be surprised to discover that it doesn't take that much to begin to live this dream – to learn to walk the way of light. It's so easy, in fact, that even children can do it. Actually, children tend to do it without even realizing it. They love unconditionally, forgive without retaining any baggage and generally bring joy to all who encounter them.

But as we get older, we carry with us our own swords and spears that bring destruction rather than life. We become tainted by the world, developing opinions, prejudices and behaviours that lead us further into the darkness that is all around us. It shows up in our attitudes, our words; in who we avoid and how we treat others, especially those who are different than us.

As I've mentioned in the past, my next-door neighbour in the townhouse I purchased is a drug dealer who uses their place to both sell and use hardcore drugs and they offer their place as to clients and friends who would otherwise be on the street with nowhere to sleep.

I determined early on that these people, like my other neighbours, are children of God and I try to treat them as such. It's easy, however, to be drawn to the dark side and begin to live in fear and frustration.

Mostly this happens when I spend time with others in the complex who are angry, frustrated and determined to get these "scumbags" (they're term not mine) out of the complex. In private and to their faces, some of the other owners slander the addicts, call them names and talk about what a "slum" they've made of our otherwise lovely little community.

A couple of weeks ago, one of the vocal townhouse owners was attacked with a baseball bat by one of my neighbour's customers. I don't know what happened to provoke this encounter, if anything, but I began to wonder if I was safe living there and breathed a sigh of relief to find out that, after a year of legal wranglings, the bank finally had the court's approval to take over and sell the suite.

But then, once again, I encountered a couple of the street folk on the stairs as they tried to maneuver their bikes down to the walkway. I paused, smiled and moved to the side so they could get by. Their response?

"I'm sorry, ma'am. Excuse me. I'm really sorry."

"Not a problem" I responded with a smile, and we very peacefully went our separate ways.

I worry, what will happen to these folks when they are evicted and the locks are changed. Will they find another place to squat, another couch to crash on, or will they, in these icy cold days of winter, be out on the street? My heart hurts for them.

It matters, how we treat people, whether we do our best to respect one another or not. It matters.

We have a tendency to think that darkness swallows up the light and it can if we let it. But the reality is that it's quite the other way around.

It's light that overtakes darkness. Light a single small flame in a dark room and notice how much easier it is to see who or what is in the room with you.

Like that one small, flickering flame, we too can bring light into the darkness. It may not seem like much in the moment, but when you learn to live and walk in the light, the glow that surrounds you becomes apparent to everyone you encounter.

There is a wonderful children's book entitled "Have You Filled a Bucket Today?" written by Carol McCloud which offers another way to think about this. Let me read you a few excerpts and you'll see what I mean...

"All day long, everyone in the whole wide world walks around carrying an invisible bucket. You can't see it, but it's there. ... Your bucket has one purpose only. Its purpose is to hold your good thoughts and good feelings about yourself. You feel happy and good when your bucket is full and you feel sad and lonely when your bucket is empty. Other people feel the same way too. ...

It's great to have a full bucket and this is how it works. ... You fill a bucket when you show love to someone, when you say or do something

kind, or even when you give someone a smile. ... A bucket filler is a loving, caring person who says and does nice things to make others feel special. ...

But, you can also dip into a bucket and take out some good feelings ... when you make fun of someone, when you say or do mean things, or even when you ignore someone. ... Many people who dip have an empty bucket [themselves]. They may think they can fill their own bucket by dipping into someone else's...but that will never work. ...

But when you fill someone's bucket, you fill your own bucket, too. You feel good when you help others feel good.

All day long, we are either filling up or dipping into each other's buckets by what we say and what we do."<sup>i</sup>

Filling buckets, walking in the light, one and the same. There's young woman from Alberta who understands this and teaches us a valuable lesson about kindness. (video<sup>ii</sup>)

Making someone smile; or feel welcomed; forgiven; seen; cared for; appreciated... this is what it means to walk the way of Light.

Advent invites us to awaken from our numbed plodding through life and our limited expectations of ourselves, to consider our life afresh in light of the gifts that God is about to give and indeed has already given.<sup>iii</sup>

We can get or perhaps stay on the spears and swords bandwagon or we can let our lives be transformed by the light. We can walk in darkness, heads down, filled with hurt, frustration, anger and indignancy, or we can walk in the way of light.

Because, in the words of Mr. Rogers,

“There are three ways to ultimate success: The first way is to be kind. The second way is to be kind. The third way is to be kind.”<sup>iv</sup>

So may the God of Light, enter into the darkness of our lives and open our eyes to The Light, empowering us to share The Light and to walk the way of Light today and everyday. Amen

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<sup>i</sup> McCloud, Carol. Have You Filled a Bucket Today? 2016 Ferne Press. Brighton, MI

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-student-moves-classmates-to-tears-1.5375901?fbclid=IwAR2gLIpDs4-xLxRyyEQTiI8Cs-dfpkWMvDrtarbzX8DPQlvREaH7QIzJHlo>

<sup>iii</sup> Brueggemann, Cousar, Gaventa, Newsome. Texts for Preaching Year A. John Knox Press. 1995

<sup>iv</sup> Mr. Rogers.

[https://i.pinimg.com/originals/e8/b1/b8/e8b1b8b46ca125678386ba4926c0a864.jpg?fbclid=IwAR1WeaAOPJgOrlzHA1TmQVt11oQaqkXjw\\_7Wgk\\_hKpdISWqW\\_dUa8xhl2HIE](https://i.pinimg.com/originals/e8/b1/b8/e8b1b8b46ca125678386ba4926c0a864.jpg?fbclid=IwAR1WeaAOPJgOrlzHA1TmQVt11oQaqkXjw_7Wgk_hKpdISWqW_dUa8xhl2HIE)